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The authors over the years have been strong supporters of Israel because it has been a bastion of democracy in the Middle East and because it is of critical strategic importance to U.S. interests there. But we find ourselves quite troubled by Israel's action in the Pollard case.

The Israeli government has one of the world's most sophisticated intelligence systems. And there is no doubt that Israel's espionage against both enemy and friendly states is official policy. It is not surprising that the Israeli government made the decision to deny any culpability when U.S. traitor Jonathan Jay Pollard, a government intelligence employee, was caught providing highly classified material to his Israeli military handlers. Most democratic nations and all dictatorships lie about their espionage activities. And for most governments it is convenient to accept this fictional denial of another government's espionage while prosecuting the spy.

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Going beyond the espionage norm

But in the Pollard case the government of Israel has gone beyond the norm.

It did not wait a "decent interval" before rewarding the men who ran Pollard's spying. For example, his Israeli Air Force handler, Col. Aviem Sella, was given command of Tel Nof, the second-largest Israeli air base. The team leader, Rafi Eitan, former deputy head of Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency, was appointed board chairman of Israeli Chemicals, a large government-owned corporation. These actions were the opposite of the contrition required to quiet the furor and gave the impression that the Israeli government cared little for U.S. concerns over the Pollard case.

Israeli government officials have further exacerbated the frayed relationship with the United States. They

have criticized those American Jewish leaders who have properly, as loyal U.S. citizens, criticized Israel about the Pollard case. Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir last week complained publicly that "all those who are screaming [should] not make declarations and not exaggerate."

Another government leader was quoted as saying about the U.S. Jewish leaders: "Who are they trying to impress? We have an embassy in Washington that talks to all of them — but they come here to spit on us when we're in trouble because they want to be in good with the U.S. government."

Some Israeli officials have indicated tacit support of the efforts by Israeli citizens to raise funds for the payment of the legal bills for Pollard and his convicted wife.

U.S. Attorney Joseph E. diGenova

states that "the description of this as a rogue operation is in conflict with the facts on the public record."

There is some evidence that the Israeli government may be considering reversal of its current policy of denying responsibility for the Pollard operation. Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said last week that the government "made a mistake" when it gave senior assignments to the two Pollard handlers. His government appointed a two-member "clarification commission" to re-examine the Pollard case and submit recommendations.

Israeli intransigence about its role in the Pollard case, together with its criticism of patriotic U.S. Jewish leadership, has badly eroded the U.S.-Israeli relationship, already battered by the Iran affair. It is vitally important, if Israel is to restore its credibility with its primary ally, that the Israeli government now be as forthcoming with its public and the United States as the Reagan administration has been forced to be in the Iran affair. Events reach a point in democracies when even vital security issues must take a back seat to the public's right to know.

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